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This Is Your Mihrāb: Sacred Spaces and Power in Early Islamic North Africa—Al-Qayrawān as a Case Study [†]

Javier Albarrán 

Departamento de Historia Antigua, Medieval y Paleografía y Diplomática, Universidad Autónoma de Madrid, 28049 Madrid, Spain; javier.albarran@uam.es

[†] This contribution evolved in the framework of the Center for Advanced Study “RomanIslam—Center for Comparative Empire and Transcultural Studies”, funded by the German Research Foundation (Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft, DFG), at Universität Hamburg.

Abstract: Al-Qayrawān has long been figured, especially in the culture of the Islamic West, as the Islamic city par excellence, as the fourth sacred place after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem. The prominence of this garrison city—supposedly founded by ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ in the year 50/670–671—is undeniable in the traditional account of the Islamic conquest of Ifrīqiyya. Through a case study of al-Qayrawān and an analysis of the sources recounting its miraculous foundation as well as the construction of its mosque, this article aims to study the process of sacralisation of space, how this is inserted into a given context and related to power and its consolidation, particularly in times of political, cultural, and religious transition, and how it uses, appropriates, or eliminates the previous reality. To this end, the article provides a context for the creation of al-Qayrawān as a sacred space, which relates directly to the region’s Christian past and the construction of a new Islamic identity.

Keywords: al-Qayrawān; sacred space; ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’; Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān; Islamization



Citation: Albarrán, Javier. 2023. *This Is Your Mihrāb: Sacred Spaces and Power in Early Islamic North Africa—Al-Qayrawān as a Case Study*. *Religions* 14: 674. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050674>

Academic Editor: Enzo Pace

Received: 28 April 2023

Revised: 15 May 2023

Accepted: 16 May 2023

Published: 19 May 2023



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1. The Foundation of Al-Qayrawān

The prominence of al-Qayrawān—a garrison city supposedly founded by ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ in the year 50/670–671—is undeniable in the traditional account of the Islamic conquest of Ifrīqiyya.¹ From the point of view of the foundation pattern, al-Qayrawān follows the model of *amṣār*, established several decades earlier at Baṣra, Kūfa, and Fuṣṭāṭ, during the conquests of Iraq and Egypt, where the founder was responsible for building a mosque, a governor’s palace, and for assigning plots of lands to different tribal groups (Akbar 1989, pp. 22–32; Whitcomb 2007, pp. 15–26; Kennedy 2010, pp. 45–63; Fenwick 2013, pp. 9–33; 2018, pp. 203–20). In this sense, the foundation of a garrison city in a conquered territory was a symbolic act of imperial possession and was deliberately undertaken to house the newly arrived troops and their families in locations where they would not come into conflict with the existing inhabitants and where they could be controlled and paid by the agents of the state (Kennedy 2010, pp. 45–63). Thus, from the end of the 7th century onwards, North Africa was integrated into an emerging Islamic world whose centres of power lay far to the east (Pentz 2002; Conant 2019, pp. 11–22).

The importance of al-Qayrawān is emphasized by the miraculous account of its foundation—and that of its great mosque—that appears in the sources.² Let us briefly review, in chronological order, the earliest narratives that have been preserved.

The earliest surviving account is that of the Iraqi Khalifa b. Khayyāt (d. 240/854).³ He states that in the year 50/670–671

“when ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ conquered Ifrīqiyya, he stood at al-Qayrawān, and said three times, ‘Inhabitants of the valley! We [Muslims] shall take up residence here, if God is willing. So, depart!’ We saw reptiles come forth from underneath every

rock and tree, and eventually disappear [from] inside the valley. Then he said, ‘Settle here, in the name of God’” (Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ 1985, p. 210).

In other words, in this report the miraculous nature of the founding of the city already appears clearly. ‘Uqba channelled the divine will and, only with his words, forced the wild animals to leave the valley.

The second surviving narrative is that of the Egyptian Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam (d. 257/871) in his *Futūḥ Miṣr wa-l-Maghrib*. In a much more detailed account than that of Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ, first of all Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam states that, before ‘Uqba, in the year 34/654–5, Mu‘āwiya ibn Ḥudayj al-Tujībī “established a military station (*qayrawān*) at al-Qarn, which he continued to occupy until his return to Egypt” (Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, pp. 192–93). Later on, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam says that ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ was not satisfied,

“so he rode on with his men until he came to the place where al-Qayrawān is today (*mawḍi‘ al-Qayrawān al-yawm*) [. . .] Here he cried at the top of his voice: ‘Oh inhabitants of the *wādī*! Depart, God have mercy on you, for we are going to settle here!’ This he repeated during three days, and at the end of that time all the lions and other wild beasts and the noxious reptiles had gone; not one remained [. . .] Here he also planted his spear in the ground, saying: ‘This is your *qayrawān*’” (Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, p. 196).

Therefore, the account of the miraculous founding of the city appears in more extensively than in Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ’s account, although with the same narrative core: ‘Uqba cleans the place of beasts through a prayer to God—which in this case he repeats for three days—and then orders his men to settle there. Likewise, Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam adds another tradition according to which the place was thus protected from poisonous reptiles and scorpions for the next 40 years (Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, p. 196).⁴ Afterwards, in an encounter with the caliph Mu‘āwiya, in which ‘Uqba tries to regain his position as leader of the Islamic army in Ifrīqiyya, he confirms that he has founded al-Qayrawān and its mosque (Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, p. 197).

The third preserved source is the *Futūḥ al-Buldān* by the Iraqi al-Balādhurī (d. 279/892).⁵ Although with a different redaction, which seems to indicate another line of transmission—an eastern one derived from al-Wāqidī (d. 207/823),⁶ the text, yet again, shows the same narrative core (Al-Balādhurī 1988, pp. 226–27). Likewise, the idea attributing to ‘Uqba the building of the first structures of the new city, including the mosque, also emerges. Interestingly, al-Balādhurī adds another tradition, supposedly reaching him through inhabitants of Ifrīqiyya, which does not appear in any other source:

“According to a tradition transmitted to me by certain inhabitants of Ifrīqiyya on the authority of their *shaykhs*, when ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ al-Fihri wanted to build al-Qayrawān, he began to consider regarding the site of the mosque, and he saw in a dream a man calling to prayer at a certain spot, where he later erected the minaret (*mi’dhanatihi*). When he woke up, he started to build the boundary marks (*al-manābir*) where he had seen the man standing, after which he built the mosque (*al-masjid*)” (Al-Balādhurī 1988, pp. 226–27).

Hence, a second miraculous event materializes: through a dream, ‘Uqba knew where to build the minaret of the mosque, as well as the building boundaries.

The next available account is the one by al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923),⁷ who follows the same line of transmission as al-Balādhurī—that is, al-Wāqidī’s—on Ifrīqiyya, offering a summary of the same information (Al-Ṭabarī 1967, vol. 5, p. 240). We thus reach the *Kitāb tabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqiyya wa-Tūnis* by Abū-l-‘Arab al-Tamīmī (d. 333/945) (Brockopp 2017, pp. 165–93), the first text written by a scholar from Ifrīqiyya on which I will comment. This work is of a totally different genre from the chronicles analysed so far. It is a biographical dictionary of North African ‘ulamā’—mainly Mālikīs—that begins with a section dedicated to the *faḍā’il Ifrīqiyya*, that is, the religious merits of the region. It is in this first part where the traditions about the foundation of al-Qayrawān appear. Several of them follow the narrative core that has been seen so far, since Abū-l-‘Arab uses the same sources as Ibn

‘Abd al-Ḥakam and al-Wāqidī (Abū-l-‘Arab al-Tamīmī 1915, pp. 1–17). However, on other occasions he presents a modified narrative, even though he extracts the information from the same sources as previous authors, as is the case of the Egyptian al-Layth b. Sa’d (d. 175/791)⁸, who had already been quoted by Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam. For example, he makes ‘Uqba b. ‘Āmir (d. 58/678)⁹ the main character of the miraculous action, together with the foundation of al-Qayrawān, instead of ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’, remarking that the former was a companion of the Prophet while the latter was not (Abū-l-‘Arab al-Tamīmī 1915, pp. 1–17). Therefore, it seems that the purpose of Abū-l-‘Arab was not to offer a coherent historical account, but rather to incorporate all those traditions which may have been useful to highlight the merits of Ifrīqiyya. In this sense, the *Ṭabaqāt* mentions, for the first time, the presence of companions of the Prophet—specifically 25—in ‘Uqba’s army, a group who helped the Muslim leader with his prayer to God (Abū-l-‘Arab al-Tamīmī 1915, pp. 1–17).

The *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* by al-Mālikī (d. after 449/1057),¹⁰ a scholar from al-Qayrawān, is a text of the same nature as Abū-l-‘Arab’s *Ṭabaqāt*, that is, a biographical dictionary composed with the aim of praising the region of Ifrīqiyya and its ‘*ulamā*’. Al-Mālikī’s book also opens with an account of the virtues of Ifrīqiyya, recounting the conquest of the region by the Muslims. In addition to oral narratives heard from his contemporaries, he relied on numerous Mālikī written sources, such as the work by Abū-l-‘Arab himself (d. 333/944), as well as al-Khushanī’s (d. 371/981).

In the *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, in addition to the traditional narrative core (Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, pp. 10–13, 32), there are several reports that seem to have their origin in local transmissions. For example, one of them recalls the fragment reproduced by al-Balādhurī, which was supposedly transmitted to him by inhabitants of Ifrīqiyya. This narrative states that ‘Uqba “led them to the site of the great mosque (*al-masjid al-a’zam*), and traced its plan without building anything in it”. People did not agree on where the *qibla* should be, a matter of great importance since, apparently, “the people of the Maghreb (*ahl al-maghrib*)—they said to him—will regulate their *qibla* according to that of this mosque, so you should strive to establish it correctly”. For this reason, they observed the information provided by the stars for several days, although without any result. Faced with such a problem, ‘Uqba

“went to bed one day worried and asked God to help him. Then he saw someone in a dream: ‘Oh friend (*walī*) of the Master of the Worlds, the Master of the Worlds says to you: When you wake up, take the banner and place it on your shoulder; you will hear, in front of you, a *takbīr* that no other Muslim but you will hear. Look where this sound stops, and that place will be your *qibla* and your *miḥrāb*. This will be God’s signal for this army and this city. And with it, God will elevate his religion and humiliate the infidels until the Last Day”.

In the middle of a great disturbance, ‘Uqba woke up and began to perform the prayer in the mosque which was not built yet. While performing two *rak’a*,

“he heard the *takbīr* in front of him. He asked those around him if they had heard it, and they said no, which led him to conclude that he was before God’s signal. Then he took the banner, placed it on his shoulder, and followed the voice, which led him to the *miḥrāb*’s place, where the *takbīr* was no longer heard. There, he placed his banner and said: ‘This is your *miḥrāb*’. And this point served as a reference for all the other mosques in the city and the rest of the countries (*sā’ir al-buldān*) [of the Maghrib]” (Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, pp. 12–13).

Therefore, although the narrative is expanded, containing much more detail and changing the minaret for the *miḥrāb*, the central point relies on the same premise as al-Balādhurī’s text: God reveals to ‘Uqba, through a dream, where the location of the mosque must be.¹¹

Thus, already in its earliest written versions—those of Khalifa b. Khayyāṭ and Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam in the first half of the 9th century—the history of the foundation of al-Qayrawān is marked by a miraculous event: ‘Uqba managed to expel the beasts out of the foundational place by resorting only to his words. To this narrative, there was soon added—by al-Balādhurī in the second half of the 9th century—the also miraculous foundation of

its great mosque: God revealed to ‘Uqba in a dream the exact location where the mosque should be built.

Such traditions emphasize the spiritual importance of a place, drawing a sacred nature through the active presence of the divinity, who acts through a holy man, in this case ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’. In this way, such location is blessed, thus becoming part of the sacred topography of the Islamic world. This reality is not only reflected in all those additions to the original narrative core appearing in *fadā’il* texts, such as those of Abū-l-‘Arab and al-Mālikī, but also in other works such as the poetry of Abū-l-Qāsim al-Fizārī (d. 345/956)¹² and the mystical texts of al-Dabbāgh (d. 696/1296), who begins his *Ma‘ālim al-imān fī ma‘rifat ahl al-Qayrawān* as follows: “As for al-Qayrawān, [. . .] it is the permanent abode of the religion and the faith, and the land purified from the filth of disbelief and the worship of idols” (Al-Dabbāgh 1968, p. 6). In this sense, al-Qayrawān has long been figured, especially in the culture of the Islamic West, as the Islamic city par excellence, as the fourth sacred place after Mecca, Medina, and Jerusalem, “a land which gathered all that is good and blessed, full of divine signs and miracles” (Hermes 2017, pp. 270–97). Therefore, al-Qayrawān was soon configured as a sacred space. But what is a sacred space and how should it be understood?

2. Sacred Space and Power in Late Antiquity

Sacred space is a concept which has been analysed extensively.¹³ There is a wide range of different types of sacred spaces, from buildings to entire cities. The features shared by the variety of spaces considered sacred often include clearly defined boundaries, certain rituals—such as pilgrimage—which can only be performed there, and special regulations often aimed at ensuring the maintenance of the ritual purity of the place. Likewise, a sacred space is also one in which a transcendent dimension to men is perceived—or is said to be perceived—which connects with the world of the supernatural. Therefore, a sacred space is a place with a special connection to the divine, where a great manifestation of the divine—Eliade’s hierophany (Eliade 1958)—has taken place. This connection can be made through a great variety of phenomena, from a topographic feature of the place to a venerated agent of the divine, such as a prophet or a holy man. In this sense, in a study of the phenomenon of holy cities in Islam, Gustave von Grunebaum suggested a tripartite taxonomy of sacred space, in increasing order of significance: sanctity deriving from the baraka dispensed by the tomb of a prophet or a saint, from a place’s soteriological role, or from an area’s cosmological significance (von Grunebaum 1962, pp. 25–37).

Nevertheless, not all sacred spaces are created by linking alleged miraculous episodes and the presence of the divine to specific locations. Truly historical events, and particularly the way they are interpreted, remembered, and commemorated, also give rise to sacred spaces. In this sense, the connection of space with the social context turns out to be very important. A manifestation of the divine can only be considered as such in the perspective of the audience, and, therefore, every alleged hierophany will fit into a historical context where it is understood, in addition to the social, cultural, and political framework, fundamental to understand the development and functionality of the sacred space. In his classic study on the legendary topography of the Holy Land, Maurice Halbwachs has shown how traditions concerning the localization of specific episodes of the life of Jesus within the urban and rural landscapes of Palestine were connected to specific social and institutional milieus (Halbwachs 1941).¹⁴ In this sense, the close connection between power and sacred spaces is a constant throughout history (Friedland and Hecht 1991, pp. 21–61).

That is the reason why in the premodern Mediterranean world creating religious topography was part of a process of claiming and appropriating space, which implies specific competitive dynamics of place making, involving both physical and rhetorical strategies—as in the case of al-Qayrawān with the “material” foundation of the city and the memory traces of this action (Urciuoli and Rüpke 2018, pp. 117–35). Sacred places served as a symbolic arena in which to generate and perform power, display shifting identities, and create social cohesion. For example, this was a common practice in late Roman North Africa, the milieu that was conquered by the Muslim armies. As Shira L. Lander states, during

“the greater century from Constantine to Honorius, North African Christians learned and deployed an important strategy in their new acquisition of and struggle for political power: the use of sacred space” (Lander 2017, p. 240). In this sense, the *futūḥ* brought the need for the rise of an Islamic sacred landscape that would integrate, appropriate, or replace the previous one—mostly Christian but not exclusively—and anchor the space in the (mythical) time of the origins of Islam.¹⁵

As Stephennie Mulder says, “Medieval Muslims experienced sacred history through the land [. . .] This emphasis on the land occurred in concert with a textual discourse of historical scholarship disseminated broadly among certain groups within a highly literate medieval society” (Mulder 2014, p. 247). Moreover, as in the case of Christianity, Islamic sacred topography created what Mulder terms a “landscape of deeds”, where a specifically Islamic notion of sacredness was primarily reliant on actions and events in alleged historical time, commemorating, for example, Quranic episodes or the intervention of God in the expansion of Islam, as in the case analysed here (Mulder 2014, p. 254).

It is in this framework where the sacredness generated around spaces and figures such as al-Qayrawān and ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ must be inserted, figures who, in turn, over time, become endowed with more tools of holiness; it has already been said, for example, how, through the works of Abū-l-‘Arab and al-Mālikī, the scholars of Ifrīqiyya used the alleged participation of various *ṣaḥāba* in the conquest of the region to highlight its religious merits.¹⁶ Likewise, ‘Uqba himself was gradually sanctified through, for example, his comparison with those who participated alongside the Prophet in the battles of Badr and Uḥud.¹⁷ In addition, it must not be forgotten, as Peter Brown proved, the social and cultural importance of the figures of “holy men” in Late Antiquity, the context in which the Islamic expansion took place. The holy man played an important role as an “arbiter of the holy”, a facilitator for the creation of new religious allegiances (Brown 1995, pp. 57–78; 1981). Therefore, it is not surprising that Muslims used figures such as ‘Uqba as the protagonists of alleged manifestations of the divine in order to define sacred spaces.

3. Tracing the Miracle

The question that should be asked now is, therefore, when was this sacred space created? When did this place begin to be associated with the miraculous event which resulted in its sacredness? Or, in other words, it is possible to know when the tradition of the miraculous foundation of al-Qayrawān—which generated or consolidated this sacred space—was created, invented (Hobsbawm and Ranger 1983), and circulated?

In the first place, let us see how far we can trace the trail, in the cases of the conquest of Ifrīqiyya and the foundation of al-Qayrawān, through the narrative sources mentioned above. Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ bases his information mainly on Mashreqī and some Egyptian sources that can be traced to the first quarter of the 8th century, through *isnāds* such as the one formed by ‘Abd al-A‘la b. ‘Abd al-A‘la (d. 188/804–805), Muḥammad b. ‘Amr b. ‘Alqama (d. 143/760–761), and Yaḥyā b. ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ḥāṭib (d. 104/722–723) (Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ 1985, p. 210). Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam, meanwhile, relies mostly on Egyptian sources that can be traced also to the early 8th century, such as al-Layth b. Sa‘d quoting Ziyād b. al-‘Ajlān, who, in turn, usually transmits on the authority of people from, again, the early 8th century (Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, p. 196). Recently, Edward Coghill has shown how Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s information on the conquest of North Africa is largely made up of texts quoted from one “backbone account”, which he learned from one of his teachers, ‘Uthman b. Ṣāliḥ (d. 219/834–5). Accordingly, through transmitters such as the Egyptian Ibn Lahī‘a (d. 174/790) (Brockopp 2017, pp. 116–33; Khoury 1986), Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s information also reaches the first half of the 8th century, specifically through the accounts of two of the teachers of Ibn Lahī‘a, Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb (d. 128/746)¹⁸ and Ibn Hubayra (d. 126/744–5), who compiled—and transmitted—all the material they had in the mid-740s (Coghill 2020, pp. 539–70).

Regarding al-Balādhurī (Al-Balādhurī 1988, pp. 226–27; Lynch 2019, pp. 65–93), his information about Ifrīqiyya comes mainly from al-Wāqidi, whose sources can be traced, once again, to the first half of the 8th century, and are mainly Mashreqī and Egyptian. In

fact, al-Wāqidī's information about North Africa ultimately came from the same sources as the account of 'Uthman b. Ṣāliḥ, making scholars such as Ibn Lahī'a the common link between al-Balādhurī and Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam (Coghill 2020, pp. 539–70). Like al-Balādhurī, al-Ṭabarī's information about Ifrīqiyya comes mainly from al-Wāqidī. On one occasion, al-Ṭabarī quotes al-Wāqidī's complete chain of transmission for the issue of the foundation of al-Qayrawān, pointing out, for example, that the information reached him through al-Mufaḍḍal b. Faḍāla (d. c. 181/797),¹⁹ who in turn was quoting Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb, who in turn relied on a member of the Egyptian army (Al-Ṭabarī 1967, vol. 5, p. 240). This *isnād* is consistent with the biographical data available for Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb: his father is known to have participated in some of the Ifrīqiyya conquest campaigns launched from Egypt and, therefore, Yazīd could be familiar with that environment (Coghill 2020, pp. 539–70).

Abū-l-ʿArab al-Tamīmī bases his information about the conquest of Ifrīqiyya and the foundation of al-Qayrawān on that same core of Egyptian sources ('Abd Allāh b. Wahb (d. 197/812),²⁰ Ibn Lahī'a, al-Layth b. Sa'd, Ziyād b. al-'Ajlān, and people from the *jund*) that can be traced as early as the beginning of the 8th century, also linked to Yazīd b. Abī Ḥabīb and Ibn Hubayra. Likewise, he also uses local sources such as 'Isā b. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān b. Abī l-Muhājir Dīnār (Mkacher 2020, pp. 64–88), from whom much of the information transmitted by the Egyptian core is extracted, or Iṣḥāq b. al-Malshūnī (d. c. 226/841),²¹ on whose account, for example, he bases the later traditions adding merits to the region, such as the one related to the presence of *ṣaḥāba* in 'Uqba's army (Abū-l-ʿArab al-Tamīmī 1915, pp. 1–17). The same can be said when tracing the sources of al-Mālikī's *Riyāḍ al-nufūs*, since, in addition to the local transmissions, he relies heavily on Abū-l-ʿArab's work and on sources used there.

Therefore, it can be concluded that the narrative core of the episode of the foundation of al-Qayrawān and 'Uqba's miracle was already in circulation in the first decades of the 8th century.

4. Ḥassān b. Al-Nu'mān and the Creation of Ifrīqiyya

It is impossible to know exactly when such a tradition arose, which could have been circulating in an "informal" way before entering the transmission network of the *ʿulamā'*. But it is possible to draw a hypothesis of when and in which context it would have been useful, at the socio-political level, if not to create, then at least to reinforce and consolidate such a tradition. In the conquest of Ifrīqiyya, there is a fundamental period for the establishment of the Islamic government, for the consolidation of the province within the Umayyad empire, and even for the configuration of al-Qayrawān and its mosque. I am referring to the rulership of Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān al-Ghassānī (r. c. 74–85/694–704),²² who, although authors such as Hugh Kennedy have pointed out that he was the "real founder of Muslim North Africa" (Kennedy 2007, p. 217), has been largely ignored.²³ Moreover, it must not be forgotten that Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān was governor during the caliphate of 'Abd al-Malik (d. 86/705), the true reformer, if not creator, of the Islamic empire, and that he probably had several encounters with him (Khalīfa b. Khayyāt 1985, p. 277; Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, pp. 201–2; Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, p. 48).²⁴

In the first place, Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān was the one who carried out the military offensive leading to the final consolidation of the Arab conquest of Ifrīqiyya, as he was also reported to have pacified, at least temporarily, the region. He conquered Carthage for a first time in the year 76/695–696 and for a second one in 79/698–699—he demolished it, burned it and built a mosque there, according to al-Mālikī (Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, p. 57)²⁵, and ended the indigenous revolts led by the figure al-Kāhina. In this sense, the *Riyāḍ al-nufūs* states in a retrospective view, "the whole Ifrīqiyya experienced stability and dwelled in security. Allāh, Great and Powerful, put an end to the era of infidels and it became land of Islam until our time and until the end of times, on God's will" (Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, p. 57). Related to this episode, he founded in the year 79/699, on the outskirts of Thunes, a minor town and bishopric in the 7th century, the new city of Tunis and its arsenal (*Dār al-sinā'a*), with the aim of creating a fleet.²⁶

Moreover, Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān established in al-Qayrawān the first and effective administration for Ifrīqiyya and the first tax collection system.²⁷ As Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam states, he “organized its registers (*dawāwīn*) and imposed the *kharāj* tax on the non-Arab (*‘ajam*) of Ifrīqiyya and those of the Berbers who continued to be Christians” (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, pp. 201–2).²⁸ We do not know if those *‘ajam* were already Muslims or not, but we do know that he carried out a policy of integration of the local population, Muslim or not. In this regard, Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam reports that “he put Ibrāhīm b. al-Naṣrānī—son, therefore, of a Christian—in charge of the *kharāj*” (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, pp. 201–2). Likewise, he integrated al-Kāhina's two sons into his army after their conversion, giving them command over Berber troops (Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, p. 56). Furthermore, to ensure the loyalty and collaboration of the new Berber Muslim converts, he enrolled them in the *dīwān* and offered them a stake in the distribution of income-producing lands.

Additionally, the recapture of Carthage by Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān, in the year 79/698–699, appears to have served as an impetus for the creation of a new monetary regime in North Africa. The new administrative and tax regime meant that there was a need to begin to mint the first series of Islamic coins in Ifrīqiyya. This first series of Islamic coinage (dated c. 80–84/699–703) does not bear a mint name, is undated, and retains the globular form of the Byzantine models, following the gold coinage of Heraclius (d. 641) struck in Carthage, with the cross-potent on the reverse modified to a T-bar or globe on pole on steps. Regarding the legends, although they are still in Latin, they show a variety of Islamic formulas (Jonson et al. 2014, pp. 655–99; Fenwick 2020b, pp. 293–313).²⁹ To sum up, Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān inaugurated a permanent Islamic government in Ifrīqiyya, shaped the *wilāya*, and set the stage for the increasing conversion of the local population.

5. Ḥassān b. Al-Nu'mān, the Mosque, and North African Christianity

Among all these new political and administrative measures, it is also worth highlighting Ḥassān b. Nu'mān's direct intervention in the construction of the mosque that 'Uqba had supposedly founded in al-Qayrawān. We shall now see what the sources say about it.

Although at first Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam reports that 'Uqba, when encountering the caliph Mu'āwiya, said “it was I who conquered the lands, and planted the settlements, and built the mosque for the community (*masjid al-jamā'a*)” (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, p. 197), in another account he reports that “Ḥassān b. Nu'mān set out and settled at the location where Qayrawān in Ifrīqiyya is today (*fa-nazala mawḍi' Qayrawān Ifrīqiyya al-yawm*). He built the mosque for its community (*masjid jamā'atihā*)” (Ibn 'Abd al-Ḥakam 1922, pp. 201–2). This implies that it was Ibn al-Nu'mān who founded and built al-Qayrawān's mosque, and even established the city itself. A similar perspective appears in the *Kitāb al-siyāsa wa-l-imāma*, an anonymous historical work traditionally attributed to Ibn Qutayba (d. 276/889), with a core which, although containing materials from various sources, possibly was compiled before the 10th century.³⁰ It says:

“Mūsā b. Nuṣayr entered Ifrīqiyya³¹ in Jumādā I of the year 79 [...] The mosque (*masjid*) was at that time made of branches (*ḥazīr*), its roof was not at that time made of beams. [Ḥassān] Ibn Nu'mān had built its *qibla* and what follows in weak materials” (*Kitāb al-siyāsa wa-l-imāma* 1957, vol. 2, p. 62).

Although it is a unique report, of which no other transmission is preserved, and with clear—for example, chronological—inaccuracies, it is interesting to note how the idea of Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān as the builder of al-Qayrawān's mosque and its *qibla* appears again.

Nevertheless, the most common account in the sources is that Ibn al-Nu'mān carried out a reconstruction of the mosque that 'Uqba had founded. For example, al-Mālikī reports that “he went to al-Qayrawān where he accomplished the reconstruction of the congregational mosque. He rebuilt it in a beautiful way in the month of Ramadan of the year 84 (September–October 703)” (Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, p. 56). Moreover, in an interesting fragment of the *Kitāb al-masālik wa-l-mamālik* by the Andalusī al-Bakrī (d. 487/1094), it is stated that “the *mihṛāb* of this mosque [of al-Qayrawān] was located and built for the first

time by ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’. Then, the entire building, with the exception of the *miḥrāb*, was demolished and rebuilt by Ḥassān [b. al-Nu‘mān]” (Al-Bakrī 1857, pp. 22–23).³² Al-Bakrī also mentions that

“it was he who transported there the two red columns, spotted with yellow, whose beauty is incomparable, from a church located in the place today called al-Qaysāriyya, in the *sūq al-darb*. It is said that before these columns were moved, the sovereign of Constantinople wanted to buy them by weight of gold, so they hastened to transport them to the mosque. Everyone who has seen them declares that nothing like it exists in any country in the world” (Al-Bakrī 1857, pp. 22–23).³³

Al-Mālikī, however, speaking of these *spolia*, says that the columns were in the church of a Byzantine fortress (*ḥiṣn laṭīf li-l-rūm*) called Qammūniya which was at the same location of al-Qayrawān, and that it was the Aghlabid Ziyādat Allāh (d. 223/838) who carried and installed them in the mosque (Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, pp. 32–33).

From these reports it can be concluded that Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān’s intervention in the mosque was of great importance, with some traditions asserting that it was he who founded it. Likewise, some of the sources point out that in this intervention he reused material—specifically two porphyry columns, which were given golden decoration—from a church located in the place that would later become al-Qayrawān.³⁴ A joint reading of all these sources seems to indicate that Ibn al-Nu‘mān reused these columns for the first time, and that they were later relocated by the Aghlabids. This issue of the *spolia* clearly links the region’s Christian past—represented by the church from which the columns come—with the new Islamic reality—represented by al-Qayrawān’s mosque.

The fate of the churches after the Islamic conquest of North Africa is difficult to follow. In a few cases it has been suggested that some of them were transformed into mosques, but this activity does not seem to have been particularly common (Whitehouse 1983, pp. 161–65; Prevost 2012, pp. 325–47; Touihri 2014, pp. 131–40; Conant 2019, pp. 11–22; Leone et al. 2019, pp. 1–7). On the other hand, activity dated from the 10th/11th c. can be found in some churches at Sufetula, Bulla Regia, and al-Qayrawān itself. Moreover, Christians did not only continue to use existing churches, but also built new ones. For example, at al-Qayrawān, Qustas (Constans) was granted permission to build a church in the city in the late 8th century (Fenwick 2020a, p. 142). In this sense, it is still very unclear when Christianity effectively ended in the region (Speight 1978, pp. 47–65; Savage 1997, pp. 107–10; Valérian 2011, pp. 131–50; Conant 2012, p. 362; Leone et al. 2019, pp. 1–7).

For North African Christians, Carthage was the reference city (Ennabli 1997). It was the capital under Punic, Roman, Vandal, and Byzantine rule, and one of the largest cities in the Mediterranean. Moreover, archaeological excavations have confirmed that a considerable number of basilicas and ecclesiastical complexes were either built or extensively remodelled in the decades after the Byzantine conquest of Africa, thus transforming the city into a major pilgrimage centre while promoting religious and political legitimacy (Miles 2019, pp. 57–75; Van der Leest et al. 2005; Bockmann 2019, pp. 77–89; Duval 1982, vol. 1, pp. 5–24).³⁵ Already since the 5th century the city had been housing several monasteries, such as the one devoted to Saint Stephen, whose relics supposedly came to the city in that century (Duval 1982, vol. 2, pp. 624–32; Ennabli 2000, p. 37; Bockmann 2013, pp. 112–14).

However, although some Islamic traditions emphasize the importance of Christianity in Carthage,³⁶ most of them omit its importance as a Byzantine capital and as the centre of North African Christianity.³⁷ That is to say, the sources seem to suggest a certain *damnatio memoriae* of the Christian past of the city—as Ralf Bockmann has already pointed out (Bockmann 2019, pp. 77–89)—despite the fact that we continue to witness Christian activity in it even after the Islamic conquest. This is consistent with the policy that Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān carried out after the second conquest of the Byzantine capital: its destruction, at least partially, a reality that is not only evidenced by written sources but also by the archaeological record (Stevens 2016, pp. 105–17; Fenwick 2019, pp. 137–55; 2020a, p. 40).³⁸ In this sense, this is the only example of a capital being destroyed and abandoned in

the entire process of expansion of the Islamic empire, a phenomenon with an enormous symbolic meaning. Furthermore, its materials were reused in places such as Tunis or al-Qayrawān.³⁹

6. Al-Qayrawān and the Appropriation of Carthage

Along with the conquest and destruction of Carthage, Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān undertook his important constructive intervention in al-Qayrawān’s mosque. That is to say, he put an end to the centre of North African Christianity and reinforced what would become the centre of Islamic religiosity in the region. As Bockmann has already underlined, al-Qayrawān’s mosque “relates directly to Carthage, pointing clearly to the fact that until the Arabic conquest, Carthage was the undisputed centre of Byzantine Africa” (Bockmann 2019, pp. 77–89). In this sense, I believe that both episodes—the conquest of Carthage and the reconstruction of the mosque—should be understood as part of the same policy: the consolidation of the Islamic government in the region and the transition of centres of power.

There is an appropriation⁴⁰ of the importance and, above all, of the sacredness of Carthage—the heart of Christianity in the region and a centre of pilgrimage and religiosity—and it is transferred to al-Qayrawān, which becomes the core of the new faith and of the new power in North Africa. Although it is not clear if there was a material *spolia*—the sources point out that the reused columns came from a church located in the same place where the Muslim capital was established—there was indeed a symbolic *spolia*, a *translatio* of the sacred space and the holiness of Carthage to al-Qayrawān.⁴¹ The Islamic expansion led Muslims to live in a place and in a time largely ruled by Christian religiousness, and it is not surprising, as Mattia Guidetti has said (Guidetti 2016, pp. 67–70), that Christian holy places exerted on Muslims a considerable fascination, which would lead to an acknowledgment of their sanctity. Together with the consolidation of the new power and the transformation of the political geography of the region, this is the framework in which the phenomenon studied in this chapter must be placed.

This is the context in which the creation of, or at least the circulation and reinforced dissemination of, the miraculous episode of the founding of al-Qayrawān must be inserted, an account which ended up consolidating the city and its mosque, as well as defining it as a sacred space acting as a power tool. Additionally, all this fits into the policy of government carried out by Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān. In addition to creating the power bases of the Islamic rule in the region, for example, through taxation or monetary strategy, he carried out various political programs to integrate the local population and the new converts to Islam, such as the establishment of a new *ḍirwān*. The reproduction of a sacred tradition for the city, and the subsequent creation of a sacred space, could be a useful tool for this process, thus creating rally points of a new identity that overlaps the existing ones, and allowing a refocus on the spirituality, and thus loyalty, of the indigenous population under the Islamic administration. Therefore, it produced social cohesion and gave to the new rulers—and their religion—legitimacy and should be understood as one of the key tools of “Islamisation”.

In this sense, this is not an isolated case, but something that was happening throughout the Umayyad territory since the end of the 7th century, when it began to be filled with symbols of a distinctively Islamic nature. The most famous case is undoubtedly that of ‘Abd al-Malik’s creation of the Dome of the Rock in Jerusalem—it must be remembered that Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān seems to have been in direct contact with this caliph—as a sacred space close to his centre of power and a visual expression to Islamic rule in what had been for centuries a thoroughly Christian land. This policy relied upon using and appropriating, also from the Christian sphere, a recognizable religious iconography.⁴²

Regarding the materiality granted by Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān to this new sacred space, as I have already said, it is not possible to know if he transferred material from Carthage to al-Qayrawān during his reforms, although it is possible that this was the case for Tunis. However, it is known, as can be drawn from the sources, that two porphyry columns from

a nearby church were reused, objects which, following al-Bakrī's account (Al-Bakrī 1857, pp. 22–23), must have had an important symbolic meaning, since the Byzantine emperor tried to get them back. Although this account can be understood as a triumphalist speech on Byzantium, early Muslims seem to have increased the aura of their own holy places by connecting new mosques to renowned churches (Guidetti 2016, p. 156). Marble columns were a particularly well-known source of sacredness.⁴³ These *spolia* could, therefore, be part of Ibn al-Nu'mān's project to endow the place with holiness. Likewise, this phenomenon could have been reinforced with the reused Latin inscription founded in the lower courses of the minaret, embedded in the paving of the staircase and hidden within a very dark angle.⁴⁴ This inscription belonged to a male monastery dedicated to none other than St. Stephen, the proto-martyr and one of the most revered saints in Late Antiquity. In Carthage there was a monastery dedicated to this saint, but according to the sources it was a female convent (Duval 1982, vol. 1, pp. 5–24, 68–71, vol. 2, pp. 624–32), so, although it would be very stimulating, this *spolia* could not come from there. However, the sacredness it gave to the new space is clear.⁴⁵

7. Final Remarks: From the Sacralization of Space to the Creation of a Place of Memory

Following this analysis, the first that attempts to understand the account of the miraculous foundation of al-Qayrawān from a holistic approach, setting it within the dynamics of its context—that of Late Antiquity and Early Islam—and the socio-political and cultural processes of the sacralisation of space and the invention of traditions, several final remarks can be highlighted:

- The importance of al-Qayrawān is emphasized by the miraculous account about its foundation—and that of its great mosque—that appears in the sources. Such traditions emphasize the spiritual importance of a place, In this way, such a location is blessed, thus becoming part of the sacred topography of the Islamic world.
- Thus, al-Qayrawān was configured as a sacred space. Sacred places served as a symbolic arena in which to generate and perform power, display shifting identities, and create social cohesion. In this sense, the Islamic conquests brought the need for the rise of an Islamic sacred landscape that would integrate, appropriate, or replace the previous one—mostly Christian but exclusively—and anchor the space in the (mythical) time of the origins of Islam.
- After analysing the transmission chain of the miraculous account about the foundation of al-Qayrawān and its great mosque, it can be concluded that the narrative core of the episode was already in circulation in the first decades of the 8th century.
- Although it is impossible to know exactly when such a tradition arose, it is possible to draw a hypothesis of when and in which context it would have been useful, at the socio-political level, if not to create, then at least to reinforce and consolidate such a tradition. In the conquest of Ifrīqiyya, there is a fundamental period for the establishment of the Islamic government and for the consolidation of the province within the Umayyad empire: the rulership of Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān al-Ghassānī. Moreover, his intervention in al-Qayrawān's mosque was of great importance, with some traditions remembering him as the mosque's founder.
- Along with the conquest and destruction of Carthage, Ḥassān b. al-Nu'mān undertook important constructive intervention in al-Qayrawān's mosque. There is an appropriation of the importance and, above all, of the sacredness of Carthage, and it is transferred to al-Qayrawān, which becomes the core of the new faith and of the new power in North Africa. Although it is not clear if there was a material *spolia*, there was indeed a symbolic *spolia*, a *translatio* of the sacred space and the holiness of Carthage to al-Qayrawān.
- This is the context in which the creation of, or at least the circulation and reinforced dissemination of, the miraculous episode of the founding of al-Qayrawān must be inserted, an account which ended up consolidating the city and its mosque, as well as defining it as a sacred space and acting as a tool of power. In this sense, it is

not an isolated case, but something that was happening throughout the Umayyad territory since the end of the 7th century, when it began to be filled with symbols of a distinctively Islamic nature.

Once this tradition was launched and the sacred space created, its function was recontextualized with the passing of time. In other words, became a place of memory with varied receptions that serve various purposes (Nora 1989, pp. 7–24); references are changed and refashioned in different ways in their process of oral and written transmission, they are produced and reproduced because they are meaningful for the collective memory and, therefore, appear in different ways in the sources, expanded or reduced, with new characters or actions. In this sense, and as Munt states, “the reasons for any long-lived sacred space’s acceptance as such have to evolve and adapt over time as political and social circumstances change [. . .] Sacred space is culturally constructed and reconstructed” (Munt 2014, pp. 8–15).

Thus, different stories were added to the original narrative core, such as that of the miracle related to the minaret transmitted by al-Balādhurī and which appears in local tradition, perhaps justifying the authority of the Mālikī ‘*ulamā*’ in the context of the political tension they had with the Aghlabids (Brockopp 2011, pp. 115–32; 2017, pp. 165–93; Goodson 2018, pp. 88–105); likewise, this can be seen in the different reports, appearing in works, such as the *Kitāb ṭabaqāt ‘ulamā’ Ifrīqiyya wa-Tūnis*, where this sacred space serves that same Mālikī ‘*ulamā*’ as a gathering point of identity in their resistance against the Fatimid power.⁴⁶ On the other hand, powers such as the Muhallabids or the aforementioned Aghlabids also recontextualized and appropriated this sacred space and its memory, in this case, through construction projects (Mahfoudh 2018, pp. 163–89). In other words, al-Qayrawān—and its great mosque—as a sacred space, was thus consolidated as a tool of power, and its memory was constantly contested by different audiences.

Funding: This research received no external funding.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Not applicable.

Informed Consent Statement: Not applicable.

Data Availability Statement: Not applicable.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Notes

¹ See, for example, (Taha 1989, pp. 55–83; Benabbès 2004, pp. 176–304; Kaegi 2010). On the election of al-Qayrawān’s ubication see (Taha 1989, pp. 61–62; Benabbès 2004, pp. 257–63).

² This narrative has been studied by authors such as Brunschvig, who, through the analysis of several passages from Ibn ‘Abd al-Ḥakam’s work, attributes to some of the accounts a key reading of *fiqh*, or O’Meara, who sees in it a parallel with the life of the Prophet. (Brunschvig 1942–1944, pp. 108–55; O’Meara 2007, pp. 27–41). On the other hand, authors such as Benabbès, Mahfoudh or Amara have tried to establish the different narrative traditions that have existed for this account. (Benabbès 2004, pp. 153–55; Mahfoudh 2003, pp. 140–46; Amara 2011, pp. 103–28).

³ On Khalīfa b. Khayyāt see (Andersson 2018).

⁴ Similar accounts on snakes can be found in legends regarding the cities of Fez and Saragossa. Could al-Qayrawān’s miracle set the pattern for this kind of myths? See (Al-Ḥimyarī 1974, p. 317; O’Meara 2007, pp. 27–41).

⁵ On al-Balādhurī see (Lynch 2019).

⁶ He wrote a *Futūḥ Ifrīqiyya* that is now lost. See (Mkacher 2020, pp. 64–88).

⁷ On al-Ṭabarī see (Shoshan 2004).

⁸ Egyptian traditionist. (Brockopp 2017, pp. 116–33).

⁹ Umayyad governor of Egypt.

¹⁰ See (Idris 1969, pp. 117–49).

¹¹ Mahfoudh argues that the account that appears in al-Mālikī’s *Riyād* originated in the 10th century, probably in the context in which the Fatimid Caliph al-Mu’izz (d. 365/975) intended to tear down the *miḥrāb* built by the Aghlabid Ziyādat Allāh (d. 223/838) and to replace it with a well-oriented one, which was then consolidated in the 11th century as part of the attempt

by al-Qayrawān's jurists and geometers to establish legal rules and religious foundations to determine the correct *qibla*. (Mahfoudh 2003, pp. 147–50). Mahfoudh is correct in the autochthonous, North African origin of this account, but is wrong in the dating. Although it is possible that in the 10th and, particularly, the 11th centuries, the mention of the debates on how to establish the *qibla* were added to the report, the core of this tradition was already well established by the middle of the 9th century, when, as has been said, al-Balādhurī transmits it.

- 12 See (Hermes 2017, pp. 270–97).
- 13 See, for example, (Friedland and Hecht 1991, pp. 21–61; Markus 1994, pp. 257–71; Caseau 2001, pp. 21–59; Hamilton and Spicer 2005, pp. 1–23).
- 14 See also the studies by Peter Brown on the figure of the holy man in Late Antiquity (Brown 1981).
- 15 See, for example, (Guidetti 2016, pp. 20–35).
- 16 Within these “holy deeds” that marked the Islamic sacred landscape, the figure of the Prophet and everything that could be connected to him was of great importance. Starting from the idea of closeness to the Prophet and of contact with him or with those who knew him, the early Islamic discourse on prestige and legitimacy was to be based, among other things, on the Quranic concept of precedence or priority, *sābiqa*. See (Afsaruddin 2002).
- 17 “Shahr b. Ḥawshab reported about this cursed place called Tahūda (the place where ‘Uqba was killed and his army defeated), that the Prophet had forbidden to live there, saying: ‘There will be killed men of my *umma* while they wage *jihād* in the path of God; their reward will be the same as that of the people of Badr and Uḥud’”. (Abū-l-‘Arab al-Tamīmī 1915, pp. 1–17). Those who had participated in the Prophet’s expeditions such as Badr and Uḥud also had *sābiqa*. (Afsaruddin 2008, pp. xvii, 27).
- 18 Traditionist from al-Fuṣṭāṭ. (Khoury 1986, pp. 114–15; Motzki 1999, pp. 293–317; Brockopp 2017, pp. 116–33; Coghill 2020, pp. 539–70).
- 19 Egyptian Mālikī traditionist and *faqīh*. (Tillier 2014, pp. 412–45).
- 20 Egyptian Mālikī traditionist and *faqīh*. He had a tremendous influence in spreading the Mālikī school in Egypt and the Maghreb. (Brockopp 2000, pp. 20–21).
- 21 Born in Malshūn, a village near Tahūda and, according to Abū-l-‘Arab, inhabited by non-Arabs (*qariya li-l-‘ajam*). He was a historian and a Mālikī *faqīh* who was also a disciple of Ṣaḥnūn in al-Qayrawān. (Abū-l-‘Arab al-Tamīmī 1915, p. 98).
- 22 There is no consensus on the arrival date of Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān. Some authors such as Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ place it as early as the year 57/676–677 (Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ 1985, p. 224), while others such as Ibn al-Athīr place it in the year 74/694. See (Benabbès 2004, pp. 286–88).
- 23 No monographic study has been devoted to his rulership.
- 24 On ‘Abd al-Malik’s reform see (Donner 2010, pp. 194–224).
- 25 A Byzantine fleet recaptured Carthage in the year 78/697, shortly after Ibn al-Nu‘mān had first captured it. See (Taha 1989, p. 71; Benabbès 2004, pp. 300–10; Kaegi 2010, pp. 247–49).
- 26 See (Taha 1989, pp. 71–72; Fenwick 2018, pp. 203–20; Bockmann 2019, pp. 77–89).
- 27 See, for example, (Taha 1989, p. 71; Kennedy 2007, pp. 217–22; Fenwick 2020b, pp. 293–313).
- 28 See also (Khalīfa b. Khayyāṭ 1985, p. 224; Al-Mālikī 1983, vol. 1, p. 56; Ibn ‘Idhārī 1983, vol. 1, pp. 34–39).
- 29 On early Islamic North Africa coinage see (Leuthold 1967, pp. 93–99; Balaguer 1979, pp. 225–41; Bates 1995, pp. 12–15; Jonson 2014; Fenina 2016, pp. 115–68; Ariza 2017, pp. 88–113).
- 30 See (Hamori 1994, pp. 89–125). I would like to thank Luis Molina (EEA-CSIC) for his help on this issue.
- 31 The author uses Ifrīqiyya instead of al-Qayrawān to refer to the city, which could denote that he is using old material.
- 32 His main sources are the *Kitāb fi masālik Ifrīqiyya wa-mamālikihā* by the Qayrawānī Muḥammad b. Yūsuf al-Warrāq (d. in Cordova in the year 362/973), a work unfortunately lost; and the *Ta’rikh Ifrīqiyya wa-l-Maghrib* by Ibn al-Raḳīq (d. after 417/1027–8), a Qayrawānī scholar writing in Ifrīqiyya under the Zirids. His work is preserved in different fragments in later sources. In al-Bakrī’s text can be found some traces of earlier sources such as the *Futūḥ Ifrīqiyya* by ‘Īsā b. Muḥammad b. Sulaymān b. Abī-l-Muḥājir Dīnār.
- 33 Similar accounts appear in other sources such as, for example, the anonymous *Kitāb al-istibṣār fi ‘ajā’ib al-amṣār* (12th c.): “With regards to the mosque of al-Qayrawān, there are two red columns embellished in yellow; they are so beautiful that it is impossible to find anything similar. They were in one of the churches of the Greeks, and it was Ḥassān b. al-Nu‘mān who transferred them to the mosque of al-Qayrawān. The columns are in front of the *miḥrāb*, supporting its dome”. (*Kitāb al-istibṣār fi ‘ajā’ib al-amṣār* 1852, p. 114).
- 34 Although the miraculous tradition discussed before indicates that al-Qayrawān was founded in an uninhabited place—or, to be more exact, inhabited only by wild beasts—other traditions indicate that the city was located on a previous Roman settlement. Some sources claim that this place was called al-Qammūniya, as noted in al-Mālikī’s text quoted previously. However, this name is very ambiguous in the sources, and with it they are probably referring to the former Byzantine province. See (Abū-l-‘Arab al-Tamīmī 1915, pp. 1–17; M’Charek 1999, pp. 139–83). From an inscription found while carrying out some reparations on the

mosque, today it is believed that the town on which al-Qayrawān sits was the ancient Roman settlement of Iubaltiana. See (Benabbès 2004, pp. 244–46; Fenwick 2018, pp. 203–20).

- 35 In particular, the veneration of local African martyrs such as the influential martyr-bishop Cyprian, the Seven Monks of Gafsa, Perpetua or Felicitas, was used as a vehicle for these aims. On St. Cyprian and his veneration in Carthage see (Bockmann 2013, pp. 96–100). For the veneration of Perpetua and Felicitas outside of Africa see (Bockmann 2014, pp. 341–75). For the burial of the Seven Monks of Gafsa at Carthage see (Ennabli 2000, pp. 81–138; Bockmann 2013, p. 113). Carthage’s importance as a pilgrimage centre seems to have survived even after the Islamic conquest: a group of pilgrims visited Cyprian’s tomb as late as the 9th c. (Conant 2012, p. 366).
- 36 Abū-l-ʿArab al-Tamīmī, for example, reports: “Furāt b. Muḥammad heard from some *mashā’ikh* who had learned the stories of the first Muslims that Ishāq b. Abū ‘Abd al-Mālik al-Malshūnī said: ‘No prophet entered ever Ifrīqiyya and were the disciples of Jesus who introduced faith’”. Nevertheless, previously he stated that ‘Abd al-Raḥmān b. Ziyād b. An‘um said: “I was walking with my paternal uncle in Carthage, when we passed near a tomb on which was written in Himyarite characters the following: ‘I am ‘Abd Allāh b. al-Irāshī, missionary of the apostle of God, Ṣāliḥ, he sent me to the inhabitants of this city. I arrived in the morning and they killed me unjustly. God will punish for their conduct’”. (Abū-l-ʿArab al-Tamīmī 1915, pp. 1–17).
- 37 See the exhaustive list of Arabic sources that offer some information on Carthage in (Mahfoudh and Altekamp 2019, pp. 91–119).
- 38 Christian religious spaces seem to have been particularly affected: for example, fire destroyed the church of Bir el-Knissia and the north and south transepts of the Basilica of Bir Messaouda, and there is a substantial collapse layer elsewhere. See (Miles 2006, pp. 199–226).
- 39 In fact, there are numerous Arab sources that indicate that Carthage was famous for its ruins and for the amount of marble that was available and could be reused. See (Mahfoudh and Altekamp 2019, pp. 91–119). On the reuse of marble in Islamic buildings see (Guidetti 2016, pp. 97–119). For the North African context see (Saadaoui 2008, pp. 295–304; Mahfoudh 2017, pp. 15–42). For a comprehensive state of the art on *spolia* in the Islamic world see (Guidetti 2016, pp. 123–32).
- 40 Beyond the simple acknowledgment of concepts such as “borrowing” or “influence”, the term “appropriation” highlights the motivation for such an act: to gain power over. (Ashley and Plesch 2002, pp. 1–15).
- 41 In this sense, Bandmann has linked *spolia* to sacred places. He argues that while a building could be erected on a sacred space, it could also be possible to transfer holiness from one place to another by moving *spolia*. (Bandmann 2005).
- 42 On this issue, see (Grabar 2006, pp. 151–79).
- 43 For this issue see (Guidetti 2016, pp. 141–57). For the meaning and iconography of columns in Late Antiquity see also (Heidemann 2010, pp. 149–95). In the Early Islam there are other examples of the reuse of marble columns in the construction of foundational mosques. One example is that of Kūfa. See (Wheatley 2001, p. 48).
- 44 Although the present-day minaret is from the Aghlabid period, due to its unremarkable location it is most likely that these reused materials were already in the mosque previously, as well as others used by the Aghlabids in their reconstruction of the building. (Diehl 1894, pp. 383–93; van Moorsel and Van der Vin 1973, pp. 361–74).
- 45 On the other hand, in addition to the possible acknowledgement of the sacredness of places such as this by the conquerors, there is numerous evidence that the early Muslims felt a certain fascination for monks and monasteries as places where “wonders” regularly took place. See, for example, the *Book of Monasteries* by al-Shābushtī (d. 388/998). (Al-Shābushtī 1951). I want to thank Georg Leube (Bayreuth University) for this reference. On this issue, see also (Sahner 2017, pp. 149–83; Livne-Kafri 1996, pp. 105–29).
- 46 For example: “I read from Ishāq b. al-Malshūnī (d. c. 226/841) that ‘Uqba b. Nāfi’ had with him in his army twenty-five Companions of the Prophet. Having gathered the main Companions and the leaders of the army, he toured the city of al-Qayrawān with them and then began to invoke God on his behalf. He said in his prayer: ‘Oh my God, fill it with knowledge (*‘ilm*) and legal sciences (*fiqh*), inhabit it with obedient worshipers, make it a place of power for religion and degradation for those who do not believe in You. May it strengthen Islam and be safe from the tyrants (*jabābira*) of the earth’”. (Abū-l-ʿArab al-Tamīmī 1915, pp. 1–17).

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